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MOST SECRET.COPY NO. 18W.M. (40) 92nd CONCLUSIONS. MINUTE 5.Confidential Annex.

(14th April, 1940).

OPERATIONS IN
NORWAY.

(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (40) 91st
Conclusions,
Minute 3.)

THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY said that the Naval and Military Commanders for Operation Rupert would arrive in the Narvik area during the course of that day. No news had yet been received of the strength or location of the German military forces at Narvik, but it seemed that the landing of the initial contingent might possibly be made in the town itself. An unconfirmed report had been received that the German forces were in retreat and were being rounded up by Norwegians.

The altered situation at Narvik permitted a more hopeful view to be taken with regard to operations in the Trondhjem area (Operation Maurice).

He had had a telephone conversation with M. Reynaud, who was prepared to give us a free hand in the employment of the division of Chasseurs Alpins.

The Naval Staff had suggested that it might be possible to effect a landing at Trondhjem itself.

It was anticipated that we should be able to silence the shore batteries. The Service Staffs were studying all the implications of a direct landing by part of the force at Namsos in the first instance. In any event, a force of some 300 seamen and marines were to be landed from the cruisers GLASGOW and SHEFFIELD later that day (Operation 'Henry'). In addition, there would be a landing of

600 marines and seamen at dawn on 16th April at Aalesund (Operation 'Primrose'). These landings would tend to attract the Germans away from Trondhjem itself, and lead to their dispersal. It appeared probable that the following forces would be available for operations in the Trondhjem area: the second brigade of force 'Rupert'; the Chasseurs Alpins Division, with possibly further reinforcements from France later; and force 'Maurice' - a total force of approximately 25,000 men. There were indications that the Germans had only some 3,500 men at Trondhjem, and it was reported that a part of this force had already been detached from the main body to proceed in the direction of Namsos. Taking all these factors into consideration, an operation to land at Trondhjem did not appear to involve unjustifiable risks, particularly if, as seemed possible, the railway to Trondhjem was still in Norwegian hands. It was, of course, of the greatest importance that the Royal Air Force should continue to harass Stavanger to the maximum extent.

The Military Co-ordination Committee had sat twice on Saturday evening to consider the position: and was meeting again that afternoon to decide what steps should be taken to direct forces to Namsos.

THE PRIME MINISTER emphasised the importance of obtaining early information about the railway.

Stavanger Aerodrome.

THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY gave the War Cabinet details of certain naval action which was being studied in connection with Stavanger Aerodrome. He said the Naval Staff regarded it as of the utmost importance to our naval operations that the Germans should be prevented from making effective use of this aerodrome.

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Question of publicity to be given to military operations.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that from the political point of view it was of great importance that we should announce any information which might safely be made public regarding landings which our forces might make at points on the Norwegian coast. He realised that it would be for the General and Naval Staffs to decide what information could be released, but he hoped that full weight would be given to the value of such announcements in stiffening Norwegian resistance.

THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY agreed; there was no harm in making public what we were certain was already in the possession of the Germans; but there were the greatest objections to publishing anything which they did not know or which they might not know.

THE CHIEF OF THE IMPERIAL GENERAL STAFF said that in the case of any given operation no announcement whatever should be made until the main body of troops had been landed since to do so would expose the troops to air attack while landing.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS said that he would be quite content to leave this matter to the Military Co-ordination Committee, on the understanding that the latter would authorise the rapid publication of all information which might safely be disclosed.

The War Cabinet took note of the above discussion.

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MOST SECRET.

COPY NO. 18

W.M. (40) 92nd CONCLUSIONS, MINUTE 7.

Confidential Annex.

(14th April, 1940.)

THE WESTERN FRONT.

Air Action in Holland or Belgium is invaded.

(Previous Reference:
W.M. (40) 90th Conclusions,
Minute 2.)

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS drew attention to Telegrams Nos. 116 and 119 DIPP from Paris giving the French Government's reply to our proposals for the immediate initiation of bombing attacks against military objectives in Germany in the event of a German invasion of Belgium or Holland. The French Government's reply was unsatisfactory in that, although it recognised the need for immediate action in such a contingency, it made French agreement subject to reservations.

It was generally agreed that considerable pressure would probably have to be brought to bear on the French Government to induce them to change their hesitating attitude, the deciding factor probably being M. Daladier. At the same time, there were various indications - such as the recent German broadcast of an untrue statement that British aircraft had bombed a railway station in Schleswig-Holstein - that the enemy might be working up for initiating unlimited air warfare. This made it all the more necessary to have our plans completely cut and dried beforehand. The British and French Staffs should therefore enter into immediate discussions, on the lines proposed in the reply of the French Government, in order to arrive at an agreed plan, on the assumption that the French would agree to this

being carried out immediately the German attack developed.

The War Cabinet:-

Invited the Secretary of State for Air to instruct the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, British Air Forces in France, to place himself in immediate communication with the French High Command, with a view to concerting an agreed plan for the opening phase of air operations in the event of a German invasion of Holland or Belgium.

Arrangements
for the
Intervention
of the
Metropolitan
Heavy Bomber
Force in the
Land Battle
(Operation
Alphonse).

The War Cabinet also had before them a Memorandum by the Military Co-ordination Committee relating to the arrangements for the intervention of the metropolitan heavy bomber force in the land battle in the event of a German attack on the Western Front (W.P. (40) 128).

THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY said that, since this question had been discussed in the autumn, the emphasis had shifted somewhat from attacks on objectives far back in Germany to attacks closer up to the actual area of the land battle. The chief point in the paper under consideration, however, was the machinery for controlling the allocation of the heavy bomber force. This force was the equivalent of the battle fleet at sea, and any decision to employ it in its entirety in any particular operation would be a matter of the greatest moment. Nevertheless, it was essential that very rapid decisions could be taken on this matter.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR AIR explained that, under the Committee's recommendation, the general policy would, as heretofore, continue to be

laid down by the War Cabinet itself within the limits of their policy. The Chief of the Air Staff and himself would take decisions on minor operations such as were being carried out every day at the present time. There would, however, be borderline cases in which the forces to be employed would be larger, and a conflict of requirements might arise. It was to deal with these cases that the machinery recommended in paragraph 3 of the Memorandum was to be used, namely -

"The Secretary of State for Air and the Chairman of the Military Co-ordination Committee in consultation, should be empowered to decide what proportion of the metropolitan heavy bomber force should from time to time be allocated to meet the requirements of the French High Command, who will be responsible for the conduct of the land battle. In the event of a disagreement, the matter would have to be referred to the War Cabinet."

If it was intended to take some action which went beyond the general policy laid down by the War Cabinet, and if it was intended to use the whole bomber force for some operation which might be decisive, one way or the other, the decision would, of course, have to be taken by the War Cabinet as a whole.

The War Cabinet:-

Approved the recommendations of the Military Co-ordination Committee, as set out in W.P.(40)128 and as amplified in discussion.

Richmond Terrace, S.W.1.